



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 27 April – 3 May 2009



30 April 1908 **Air National Guard beginnings.** Aviation enthusiasts in the 1st Company, Signal Corps, New York National Guard, organized an “aeronautical corps” to learn ballooning—the earliest known involvement of guardsmen in aviation. Organized that year into the 1st Aero Squadron, the unit was federalized for service in 1916 as the 102nd Rescue Squadron, New York ANG. The 102nd is recognized as the oldest of all official ANG units.

29 April 1918 **Lt. Edward V. Rickenbacker**, the leading U.S. ace of World War I with 26 victories, **shot down his first airplane.** Some little-known items on the “**Ace of Aces**” –

Rickenbacker’s father died when he was still a boy. A few years later, Eddie got job road-testing cars, which eventually led him into auto racing and the original nickname “Fast Eddie” (he preferred “Rick”). At the start of World War I, he changed his name from “Reichenbacher” to “Rickenbacker.” He traveled to England in 1916 to develop an English racing car, and was closely monitored by counter-intelligence agents.

Rickenbacker had already enlisted in the Army when the U.S. entered the war. Rickenbacker wanted to fly and suggested that the Army man a combat flying unit with racing drivers, but the Army refused. Most pilot candidates were graduates of prestigious colleges, but after repairing a car carrying Colonel Billy Mitchell, Rickenbacker got his wish to transfer to an aviation unit. However, he was designated an engineering officer and could practice flying only during his free time. His superiors finally allowed him to get his wings after he proved that he had a qualified replacement. Rickenbacker (photo at right) eventually commanded the 94th “Hat in the Ring” Squadron.



1 May 1945 **Operation CHOWHOUND.** Eighth Air Force sent nearly 400 B-17s from England on a mercy mission to drop nearly 700 tons of food to starving civilians in German-occupied Holland. The Germans approved this flight and promised not to shoot down the bombers if they flew along specified routes so as not to observe German troop positions. 8th AF and RAF bombers flew five more missions and delivered nearly 7,900 tons of food.



1 May 1943 Staff Sergeant Maynard Harrison “Snuffy” Smith, a gunner aboard a B-17 Flying Fortress in World War II, earned the **Medal of Honor** for his conduct during his very first combat mission. Smith was the first enlisted airman to be awarded the Medal of Honor. The photo at left is Smith receiving his award from Secretary of War Henry Stimson. When Stimson landed at his base, Smith was called away from Kitchen Patrol (KP) duty for the presentation.

On that first mission, Smith’s aircraft was badly damaged by German fighters and anti-aircraft artillery. Fires on the aircraft were fed by the fuel supply and burned so hot that they melted holes in the airframe and starting exploding the ammunition stores. Despite the fact that he could have bailed out and several other crewmembers had already done so, Smith stayed onboard to aid wounded crewmembers.



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For 90 minutes, Smith fired at enemy fighters, threw ammunition out of the aircraft, fought the fires and gave first aid to the wounded. When his fire-fighting resources were exhausted, he wrapped himself in protective clothing and put out flames by hand. The aircraft was hit by over 3,500 bullets and pieces of shrapnel, and it broke in two as it touched down in England.

3 May 1952 An Air Force C-47 Skytrain equipped with skis and wheels, made the **first successful North Pole landing**. By the end of May, a 1500-meter long runway had been completed, and scientific operations commenced as part of Alaska Air Command's Project ICICLE. The National Archives/USAF photo at right shows the ten-man Air Force contingent who stopped at the North Pole for over three hours, collecting scientific data. The oil drum marked the exact spot of the North Pole.



2 May 1957 The USAF accepted its first F-101A Voodoo. The post-World War II requirement for a long-range bomber escort drove the initial development of the Voodoo, which originally was designed to have a large fuel/weapons pod similar to the B-58 Hustler. With the advent of jet bombers such as the B-52, SAC lost interest in the F-101. The Voodoo (photo at left) was used as an

air defense interceptor, reconnaissance platform, low-altitude nuclear fighter-bomber and, significantly, as a precursor to the F-4 Phantom.

1 May 1960 **U-2 Shootdown.** A U-2 flying out of Pakistan on a secret CIA/USAF reconnaissance flight over the Soviet Union was shot down by a salvo of fourteen SA-2 missiles. The U-2 pilot, a former Air Force officer named Francis Gary Powers, was unable to employ the U-2's self-destruct mechanism before his capture, and the wreckage was recovered by the Russians (photo at right). Among other items, they found the aircraft's camera with its film and Powers' survival pack, which included 7500 rubles and some jewelry. When President Eisenhower refused to apologize publicly for the incident, Soviet Premier Khrushchev cancelled a summit meeting. Powers was convicted of espionage by the Russians, but he was later exchanged for a Soviet agent captured by the U.S.



The U-2 incident worsened Soviet relations with both the U.S. and Pakistan, and accelerated the American satellite reconnaissance program.



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3 May 1960 General Curtis LeMay, VCSAF, announced the approval of a **single tanker force** managed by Strategic Air Command and equipped with KC-135 jet tankers. This was a part of LeMay's vision to enable the USAF jet bomber force to reach distant targets and return. Other components of the concept included the KC-135 jet tanker itself (to keep up with jet bombers), the rigid tanker boom for a more stable and rapid transfer of fuel, and single-point refueling which allowed one fuel insertion point to feed all the fuel tanks on the receiving aircraft.



3 May 1961 The **first launch of an ICBM from an underground silo** was conducted when a Titan was launched from an underground silo at Vandenberg AFB, CA.

When cryogenic liquid fuels were used in ICBMs, the missiles had to stand empty and then be fueled just prior to launch. Even silo-based missiles such as the Atlas had to be fueled in the silo and then raised to the surface for firing. New ICBMs such as the Titan II (and the Soviet UR-100) used new liquid fuels that could be stored in the missiles, thereby allowing for rapid launch directly out of silos. Introduction of solid fuel systems in the late 1960s made this even easier. (Photo of Vandenberg ICBM launch at left.)

29 April 29 to 5 May 1965 **Caribbean Crisis.** Scores of C-130s and C-124s moved 12,000 troops and 17,250 tons of equipment and supplies from Pope AFB, North Carolina, to San Isidro, Dominican Republic. The airlift, part of **Operation POWER PACK**, allowed the United States to protect and evacuate American and foreign citizens, stabilize the country and prevent unfriendly elements from taking power. Reserve transports, Air National Guard communications aircraft, and USAF fighter and reconnaissance airplanes also took part in the operation.

27 Apr 1972 **Smart Bomb Milestone.** Four USAF fighter crews, releasing Paveway I laser-guided "smart" bombs, knocked down the Thanh Hoa bridge in North Vietnam. Previously, 871 conventional sorties had resulted in only superficial damage to the bridge.

2 May 1981 **First airborne laser kill.** The Airborne Laser Laboratory (ALL), a modified NKC-135A aircraft armed with a carbon dioxide laser, shot down a drone over White Sands Missile Range, NM. Two years later, the ALL shot down five Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, proving its utility as an antimissile system. These technologies were later used in the Airborne Laser Program—a theater missile defense platform that will engage ballistic missiles in their boost phase. (Photo at right is the Airborne Laser Laboratory NKC-135A.)





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3 May 1994 The Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center at Davis-Monthan AFB received **the last B-52G** for storage (and eventual destruction as a part of strategic arms reduction agreements). This left only B-52H models in the active USAF inventory.

The B-52 series was modified in the late 1950s for low altitude penetration. About 120 structural modifications were required to withstand the aerodynamic forces of low level flight. The H-model was the only version equipped with turbofan engines which provided much better performance and fuel economy than turbojets. (The photo below is a B-52 alongside a B-17.)



30 Apr 1996 The Air Force revealed the **Tacit Blue** aircraft secretly used during 1982-1985 to validate a number of innovative stealth technology advances. Tacit Blue (photos left and below) furnished much of the technology used to produce the B-2 Spirit bomber.



28 Apr 2003 **End of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH.** The Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) at Prince Sultan AB, Saudi Arabia, with responsibility for air operations in Southwest Asia, moved to Al Udeid AB, Qatar. The move coincided with the end of the enforcement of the no-fly zone in southern Iraq. On 29 April, at a joint news conference in Riyadh, SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld and Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz announced the withdrawal of all US combat forces from Saudi Arabia to end 12 years of a continuous US presence.

On 1 May, **Operation NORTHERN WATCH** ended at Incirlik AB, Turkey.